

[Dr. Samuel B. Lathan]

W11060

Beliefs and Customs - Folkways.

Accession no.

W11060

Date received 10/10/40

Consignment no. 1

Shipped from Wash. Office

Label

Amount 6p.

WPA L. C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Form[md]3 Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Dr. Samuel B. Lathan 96 years old (white)

Place of origin Winnsboro, S. C. Date 6/28/88

Project worker W. W. Dixon

Project editor

Remarks

Library of Congress

Project #1655

W. W. Dixon

Winnsboro, S. C. 390573 DR. SAMUEL B. LATHAN 96 YEARS OLD. (WHITE)

Dr. Samuel Boston Lathan is the oldest white citizen of Chester County, South Carolina. He lives with an unmarried daughter, Miss Susie Lathan, in a handsome two-story residence on Saluda Street, near the U. S. Post Office in the town of Chester, S. C. He owns the place and is one of the outstanding citizens of the community. By reason of strength, he has attained the Biblical allotment of four score years and ten and exceeded it by sixteen years; yet, from the erectness of his carriage, the texture of his skin, and the timbre of his voice, one would never think that he was a man of that age.

"Well, it will give me pleasure to talk to you of what I remember of life from 1848 to 1938. You know I can't remember when I was born, but that event was recorded by my mother as having taken place on the 2d day of May, 1842, about three miles southeast of Blackstock, S. C., in Fairfield County. My father was a farmer, Samuel M. Lathan. My mother before marriage was Martha Patterson. The result of this marriage was five boys and six girls. I suppose the most distinguished one of the family was my older brother, Robert, born in 1829. He received his education at Erskine College, became a teacher, a school commissioner of York County, and a minister of the Gospel in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. His son, Robert, was editor of the Charleston [News & Courier?] and, later, of the Asheville [Citizen?].

"I began my education in an old field school near our home, taught by Mr. William Douglass. I was six years old then. All small children commenced in the old blue-backed speller. Beginners paid ten dollars per scholastic year of eight 2 months. When we reached the grammar grades, the tuition was fifteen dollars. In the advanced grades, including Latin and Greek, the tuition was twenty-five dollars. The school hours were from

Library of Congress

8 a. m. until 6 p. m. There was an intermission of one hour for dinner and recreation. We carried water from a nearby spring. On a shelf in the schoolroom was a wooden bucket containing drinking water. A drinking gourd hung on a nail above the bucket. It was quite a privilege to get permission to go the spring for a bucket of fresh water during school hours. Our teacher was a Presbyterian and believed in the proverb, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' The people of the community had great confidence in his learning, probity, and executive ability. Usually a whipping at school was followed by a sound thrashing at home, for good measure.

“At recess the large boys played catball, and the younger boys and girls played antony-over, marbles, and roly-hole. April the 1st was dreaded by most rural school teachers. The pupils would get inside and bar the teacher out. The teacher, who didn't act on the principle that discretion is the better part of valor, generally got the worst of it. Mr. Douglass soon learned this, and, on April Fool's Day, he would walk to the school, perceive the situation, laughingly announce there would be no school until the morrow, and leave. Our teacher required all pupils to study out loud. There was a pandemonium of spoken words going on all day in the school. Why did he require this? Well, it was to assure himself that no student was listlessly looking on his or her book and that everyone was busy. Every Friday afternoon we had a trapping spelling bee from the blue-backed speller. In this school we studied Smith's Grammar, Goff's Arithmetic, Morse's Geography, and Peter Parley's history. On the first Saturday in May, the school children went, in wagons, to Great Falls to a picnic and seined 3 for shad. The Catawba River teemed with shad in those days.

“The Fourth of July was observed at Caldwell Cross Roads. The military companies of infantry would assembly here from the surrounding counties making up a brigade. A drill and inspection were had, and a dress parade followed. There was an old cannon mounted on the field. The honor of firing it was assigned to Hugh Reed, who had been in the artillery of Napoleon's army at Waterloo and afterward emigrated to South Carolina.

Library of Congress

"A great barbecue and picnic dinner would be served; candidates for military, state, and national offices would speak; hard liquor would flow; and each section would present its 'bully of the woods' in a contest for champion in a fist and skull fight. Butting, biting, eye gouging, kicking, and blows below the belt were barred. It was primitive prize fighting. I recall that a man named McGill won the belt. He was beaten the following year by Smith Harden.

"After crops were laid by, a great deal of visiting took place among neighbors. The men inspected each other's crops and sumptuous dinners and watermelon feasts were exchanged. There was more neighborliness in the country then than now. Everybody went to church on the Sabbath, and children knew by rote the Shorter Catechism. Nearly every home in our community had family worship night and morning.

"There's something I now call to mind as strange. Funerals were never conducted inside of the churches. The ceremonial rites took place at the grave. Yes, I am a surviving Confederate soldier. I was a member of Capt. W. C. Beaty's company, in Governor John Hugh Means' regiment. I was wounded in the battle of South Mountain (Antietam). I was carried a prisoner of war to Baltimore. That was the conclusion of so much that was important in my military career.

4

"When I was a boy, my home town was Blackstock, named for its first postmaster, Edward Blackstock. The boundary line separating Chester and Fairfield Counties runs through the center of the town. Sometimes the post office is in Fairfield and sometimes in Chester. Now the line runs right through the post office, Kennedy's store. I have lived through the following wars in which my country has been engaged: The Mexican War, the War Between the States, the Spanish-American War, and the World War. I have been a constituent of the following Congressman: W. W. Boyce, W. H. Perry, A. S. Wallace, John

Library of Congress

H. Evins, J. J. Hemphill, T. F. Strait, D. E. Finley, Stanyarne Wilson, Joseph Johnson, W. H. Stevenson, Gen. John Bratton, Paul McCorkle, and the present one, J. P. Richards.

"I do not consider the military occupation and rule of South Carolina, just after the Civil War, unwise or oppressive. The country was demoralized. Disbanded soldiers, Confederates and Federals, passing through the State would have raided the homes of the residents and taken off every mule, horse, and ox, and left them without means of tilling the soil. The provost martial of this district was Capt. Livingston. I never joined the Ku Klux. Yes, there were shortages of food and clothing during the war. Molasses was a substitute for sugar; parched meal and parched ground okra seed were used for coffee; and sassafras roots were used to make tea. Flour and meal sacks were made into men's, women's and children's clothing.

"The radical, carpetbag, scalawag government was inconceivably rotten and corrupt. An executive pardon could be bought; and stealings were put through the legislature by appropriations and issuance of fraudulent bonds. Under the Constitution of 1865, judges were allowed to state and comment upon the facts and to disclose their opinion of what the verdict of a jury should be. This opinion could be and often was bought with money or its equivalent. A wealthy litigant had three chances, a bribed jury, a bribed circuit judge, and a bribed Supreme Court. A criminal had four chances, the ones I've just mentioned and a bribed governor, who could give him a pardon.

"One of the most interesting political characters evolved in this cess-pool of iniquitous politics was Judge T. J. Mackey. Born in Lancaster County, of poor parents, he went with them at an early age to Charleston, S. C. By native ability, he won a beneficiary scholarship to the Citadel, the military college of South Carolina. He was a member of the Palmetto Regiment, and he fought through the Mexican War. In the War Between the States, he was an officer on the Staff of General Sterling Price at the close of the war. When the carpetbaggers and Negroes got possession of the State government, he became a scalawag. Bright, witty, forceful, and with a veneer of good breeding, he was

Library of Congress

rewarded with the position of Judge of the 6th Circuit, and he resided right here in Chester. He was a conspicuous figure on our streets for years. Solomon in all his glory was no better arrayed. He wore broadcloth, Prince Albert coats, silk vests, checked trousers, and tall, silk, top hats, and carried gold-headed canes. During court week, he would have the sheriffs attend him with cocked hat and drawn sword, preceded by the bailiffs crying stentoriously, 'Give way! Give way! The Honorable Court is approaching! He conducted the court proceedings with great pomp, magnificence, and dignity. The suspense of all this dignity was sometimes relieved by his wit and humor from the bench. In his inimitable manner he once addressed the grand jury of Fairfield County at Winnsboro in these words: 'Mr. Foreman and gentlemen of the grand inquest of the county: In addition to what I have already charged, you might extend your investigations into the hotels and boarding houses of Winnsboro and observe the martyrs at their 'steaks,' and also ascertain whether or not certain domestic animals, better known as bedbugs, are entitled to draw pensions from the U. S. Government on account of having drawn blood from British soldiers while they were quartered here in the war of the Revolution.'

"On one occasion Mr. Lindsay, a reputable citizen of Chester, knocked a drunken Negro politician down and was prosecuted in the court for assault and battery with intent to kill. Mr. Lindsay's attorney approached the judge with an idea of finding out what the sentence would be, provided the defendant would plead guilty. Mackey replied, 'You can safely leave the matter to me, sir.'

"When the plea was accepted by the solicitor and read by the clerk, all eyes and ears of the expectant court room were turned on the judge. He said: 'Let the defendant, Lindsay, stand up. You have been charged in this indictment with an attempt to kill your fellow man. Its not your mercy that the prosecutor is not lying somewhere today in some silent graveyard. I could impose on you the maximum sentence of fifteen years at hard labor in the State penitentiary, but, as you have saved the State some expense by your plea of guilty, the sentence of this august court is that you, William Lindsay, be confined in the

Library of Congress

State penitentiary at hard labor for a period of ten years (dramatic pause) or pay a fine of one dollar.”